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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0029
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000577

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SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SERBIA: WAR CRIMES FUGITIVE ZUPLJANIN ARRESTED

REF: BELGRADE 357

Summary

1. (SBU) Serbian authorities arrested Stojan Zupljanin, one of four remaining ICTY fugitives (PIFWC), on June 11 in a Belgrade suburb. His arrest was based on a tip from Serbian Intelligence Services (BIA) and carried out by officers of the Special War Crimes Prosecutors Office with participation by Ministry of Interior police. This arrest comes as a boost to President Tadic's efforts to form a new pro-European government, and may also be a last ditch effort by the Prime Minister Kostunica-controlled intelligence services to keep their jobs. End Summary.

The Arrest

2. (SBU) Serbia's Ministry of Interior and Security Information Agency (BIA) arrested Hague fugitive Stojan Zupljanin at 11:30 AM on June 11 in the Belgrade suburb of Pancevo, local media and embassy sources confirmed. Vladimir Vukcevic, war crimes prosecutor and coordinator of the action team to locate, arrest and transfer indictees to The Hague, led the raid and arrest.

3. (SBU) Vukcevic told us on June 11, following the arrest, that Zupljanin was transferred to the Special Court where he gave a statement to the investigating judge. During his interview with the judge, Zupljanin denied his identity, claiming he was not Stojan Zupljanin. According to Vukcevic, the judge will issue an order for Zupljanin to provide DNA to confirm his identity. The prosecutors are quite certain they have arrested the real Stojan Zupljanin. They told us that Zupljanin had been under surveillance over the past several days. The arrest was carefully planned, because Zupljanin had narrowly escaped during the most recent arrest attempt on March 26 in the southern Serbian city of Nis. Vukcevic said the arrest was a joint effort by the Ministry of Interior and the BIA. Unlike the attempted arrest in Nis, this time the BIA was involved from the very beginning, according to Vukcevic.

Reactions to the Arrest

5. (SBU) Rasim Ljajic, Minister of Labor and Social Policy and President of the National Council for Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, told the Beta news agency that "the arrest is proof that Serbia is doing everything in its power to fulfill its responsibility to cooperate with The Hague Tribunal." "This is a great day for justice," said Natasa Kandic of the Belgrade based Humanitarian Law Center. Kandic told us she believed the police were functioning professionally, without political interference, and might therefore soon arrest fellow ICTY indictee Goran Hadzic (allegedly in hiding in Belarus). Vukcevic, who has already received death threats since the morning arrest, told us he was certain his team got the right man.

Next Steps

¶16. (SBU) The process for transferring Zupljanin to The Hague will follow the normal procedures as has been done in the past, Director of the ICTY Office in Belgrade Deyan Mihov (Bulgarian citizen) told us on June 11. Vukcevic said the judge will determine whether Zupljanin will be detained pending transport to the Hague. Assuming the judge orders detention, Zupljanin has three days to appeal that order. A panel of judges then has three days to rule on the defendant's appeal of detention, though they may rule more quickly. Zupljanin is therefore likely to be in The Hague within six days.

Background and Biography

¶17. (SBU) Stojan Zupljanin was born in 1951 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He graduated from the Law Faculty in Sarajevo. In 1975 Zupljanin began working for the Ministry of Interior in Banja Luka. In 1991 he became head of the regional Security Services Center in Banja Luka. In 1994 Zupljanin became internal affairs advisor to the former president of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic (an ICTY fugitive). During the war in Bosnia, Zupljanin was the highest police official in the Crisis Staff of the Krajina Autonomous Region. Zupljanin was originally indicted on December 17, 1999. The final indictment charged him with murder; extermination; persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds; torture; cruel treatment; inhumane acts; deportation; forcible transfer; wanton destruction or devastation of towns or villages not justified by military necessity; and the destruction or willful damage to religious institutions.

Comment

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¶18. (SBU) Zupljanin's arrest is welcome news for Serbia as it tries to prove it is doing all it can to fulfill its obligations to The Hague, a precondition to joining the European Union. The timing of the arrest, while Serbia is moving toward forming a new coalition government, may become the topic of political debate in the coming days. The Zupljanin arrest constitutes a turning point in Serbia's behavior toward The Hague. The real test, as we -- and the Europeans -- will continuously remind a new pro-European government, will be the arrests of Bosnian Serb Army General Ratko Mladic and "Republika Srpska President" Radovan Karadzic. End Comment.

MUNTER